

COMBONI MISSION

Summer 2024

**Welcome to Fr Gordon Rees
Pages 4 - 5**

**Farewell to
Fr Anthony Wolstenholme
Pages 6 - 7**

**Sacred Heart Novena
Pages 13 - 16**

COMBONI MISSION

Summer 2024

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From the Editor



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Rays of Hope

After weeks, if not months, of rain and stormy weather, we look forward to some sunshine and warmth. In our edition of 'Comboni Mission' we hope to bring you, our readers and benefactors, some hope and warmth to your hearts.

Sharing our needs and challenges with each other we are refreshed and confident in our prayers. Sharing and joining in prayer for peoples less fortunate than ourselves we can ease harsh and heavy burdens. And so, we invite you to enter into this world of mission and caring to reflect on our missionary landscape!

We are glad to welcome to our London Province Fr Gordon Rees from South Africa as he prepares to take up his new mission at Roehampton, our parish Church. Read on **pages 4-5** the path that Fr Gordon has trailed and his hopes for his future ministry. He asks too for our prayers. Be assured Fr Gordon!

We gathered in Sheffield, the home of Fr Anthony Wolstenholme, to bid a final farewell to him as we took part in a simple and prayerful celebration of the scattering of his ashes. You can read and reflect on the words preached during the ceremony on **pages 6-7**.

Once again, we prepare for the Feast of the sacred Heart with the Novena of the Sacred Heart on **pages 13-16**. Together with the Novena, we invite you to forward your intentions for the 30 Masses offered by the Comboni Missionaries during the month of June.

Let us continue to remember in our prayers the suffering people of wars throughout the world in many countries where we have missionaries...Sudan, Congo, Mozambique.... and others in Gaza, Ukraine.

Allow me to wish you, dear reader, friend and supporter of the Comboni Missionaries, a Happy Feast of the Sacred Heart with many blessings for you and those dear to you and may you have a wonderful and peaceful summer break with of course lots of sunshine!



Fr. John

COMBONI MISSION ISBN 0962-7154 is a quarterly publication of the Comboni Missionaries (also known as the Verona Fathers), a Catholic Missionary Institute for the evangelisation of peoples, issued free to their friends and supporters.

Cover Photo: Comboni Press

Current issue: Summer 2024

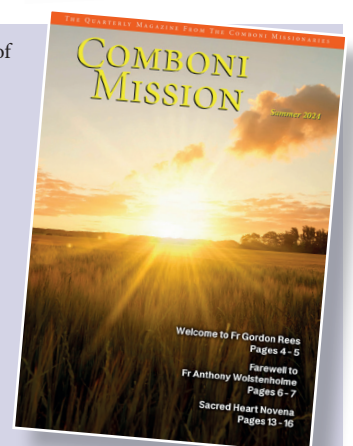
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Designed and Printed by Artworks, Dalkey, Co. Dublin.

Telephone: 00 353 1 275 1707.

Our thanks to contributors whose photographs and letters we have used.



Cover image: iStock Sohl

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Getting to know the Comboni Missionaries



Mission:

Passion For Christ - Passion For His People

We are happy to welcome Fr. Gordon Rees a Comboni Missionary to our London Province. A South African by birth and a much-travelled missionary he will soon be appointed to our church of St. Joseph at Roehampton. A warm welcome to Fr. Gordon and best wishes for his new ministry. We shall let him introduce himself to our readers.



Fr Gordon with his 2 brothers and Bishops Slattery and Sandri

I grew up in a large Catholic family in the Capital City of South Africa, Pretoria. I am the fourth child of seven (4 brothers and 2 sisters), I am also blest with 5 nephews (one died in a car accident) and 4 nieces, as well as 6 great-nephews and 2 great-nieces. All my schooling and tertiary studies were done in Pretoria. (During my time in sec-

ondary school I was set on pursuing the career of a Radio DJ on one of the national radio stations and even had personal contact with some of the radio DJs in this regard, however somewhere before finishing my Matric this dream was somehow smothered.) I worked for a total of 15 years with 2 different companies as a Computer Pro-

grammer, Systems Analyst and Project Manager. I enjoy nature, gardening, 70 & 80's music, cooking and watching international rugby, football, athletics and cricket.

After a year of discernment and a guided retreat I answered a Call from the Lord to priestly missionary life, joining the Comboni Postulancy. On completion of my Philosophy studies, I was admitted to the Novitiate of Namugongo, Uganda. During this time I also did pastoral work in a Reformatory and with Street Children in Kampala and taught English for 3 months at a school in Kasala. We were 12 who professed our First Religious Vows in May of 1998. I was sent to Rome for my scholasticate, studying Theology at the Gregorian University and later Pastoral Theology at the Angelicum. In January 2002 I professed my Perpetual Vows, in March I was ordained a deacon, along with 5 other confreres. I was ordained a priest by Archbishop George Daniel in the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, Pretoria on 17 August 2002.

My first missionary assignment was to Colombia (South America) where I arrived in November 2002. I worked in Aguachica, Cesar and in late 2003 I was sent to open a new mission among the Afro-Colombians in Tumaco, Nariño, founded in 1570 and known for a Eucharistic Miracle* that took place on 31 January 1906. We lived first with the Carmelite Fathers until we could rent a small house closer to the newly declared parish of the Resurrection

We lived among the people, sharing in their daily reality of lack of basic services, violence, killings, gangs and drug-traffick-



Missionaries of Life



Tumaco: Children and animators of the Missionary Childhood group Fr Gordon meets pope Francis

ing. We had no personal transport and did all our own housework. We prioritised spiritual and human formation and established an afterschool study centre, where the children could come and do research for the homework and assignments on the computers, or access the many books in the library (mostly donated school textbooks, encyclopaedias and other relevant texts).

We organised a major Campaign for Life (and peace) in the Diocese and in particular in all the barrios (sectors) of the parish. We trained so called “Missionaries for Life” who then visited every house in the parish area, explaining to them the Campaign and inviting them to commit to life and peace. Every house was invited to place the stickers and posters of the Campaign on their doors and walls. We also paid for advertisements calling for peace and respect for human life on all the local radio stations, had big banners and flags made calling for respect for human life. We also established an Afro Centre to promote cultural identity, where Afro music, dancing, theatre, art, handicrafts, sport, etcetera

were presented or taught. We also prioritised the formation of Catechists, the Youth and the Missionary Childhood group (4 to 14 years of age).

I returned to South Africa in 2012 and first worked as the Administrator of the *WorldWide* magazine before being appointed in July of 2014 by the Vatican as the National Director for *Missio* for South Africa, Botswana and eSwatini.

From the outset, I strove to change the common perspective of seeing *Missio* as just another collection, to that of being an instrument of formation, information and promoting the Universal Mission of the Church and enabling each Catholic to actively live their Missionary Discipleship. My visits to the various dioceses and encounters were meaningful and I grasped the hardships and poverty that so many communities experience. It was indeed uplifting to see the relief, hope and transformation that *Missio* projects brought to the lives of many people. Our annual personal meeting with Pope Francis was always special; I was fortunate to be able to communicate with him in Spanish and he

willing agreed to autograph his book “The name of God is Mercy” during one such meeting.

As *Missio* National Director I spent a month living with a family of the Phom tribe in the North East of India. The remote village of Longleng is beautiful with seemingly endless hills, ravines and jungle, thick clouds cover the valley in the morning. Most of the houses are built on the slopes and constructed with bamboo and corrugated iron. The majority of the inhabitants are Baptists with only some 30 Catholic families. While there I attended the priestly ordination of a young man from the tribe and enjoyed the inculturated liturgy. Apparently I was the first foreign missionary to ever come to stay with them. It was so enriching for me to live with people who struggle so much and have the bare minimum in life and yet are so joyful and willing to share the little they have, even with strangers.

From July 2019 I was also the Provincial Bursar until June of 2023. My missionary work has brought me to many other countries (Lesotho, Namibia, Botswana, Mozambique, Tanzania, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Uganda, eSwatini, Zanzibar, Zambia and India) and I learnt lot from their different Mission realities.

Pope Francis rightly says: “*The Mission is at once a passion for Christ and a passion for his people*”, without passion one cannot be a real missionary. With this same spirit I look forward to working in the UK, learning from this multicultural society and sharing my mission and faith experience with others.



India, at the ordination of a local priest

[*www.mysticaltheologyofthemass.com/post/eucharistic-miracle-of-the-island-of-tumaco-colombia](http://www.mysticaltheologyofthemass.com/post/eucharistic-miracle-of-the-island-of-tumaco-colombia)

FATHER “TONY”

A Perfect English Gentleman

Fr. Anthony Wolstenholme passed away peacefully on Saturday May 2, 2020 in Glasgow and was cremated and later, due to Covid and restrictions on travelling, his ashes were placed in the oratory at our house in Carmyle, Glasgow. On the 18th of March 2024, Comboni priests travelled to Sheffield and joined together with his sister and other family members to take part in the internment of his ashes in his father’s and mother’s grave. We present to our readers some simple words preached on that occasion by Fr John Clark, a Comboni priest. The service was conducted by our Provincial Fr. Ruben Padilla and together it proved to be a memorable and simple thanksgiving in memory of Fr. Anthony.



Fr. Anthony Wolstenholme RIP

“On the grand occasion of Fr. Anthony Wolstenholme’s one hundredth birthday, as we intern his ashes in his father’s and mother’s grave here in Sheffield, West Yorkshire, England, I just want to share with you some simple thoughts about the great man of God whom we are now laying to rest with solemn dignity and much pride.

Your Fr. Tony, Theresa, Margaret, Peter and Anne, nephews and nieces, had an outstanding respect and care for the material poor and needy. To this very day those

in need who knock at our door in Glasgow, remember the smiling face of the Sheffield lad. To many of them and to so many others in Sunningdale, he was an English gentleman full of finesse.

Your brother and uncle Tony was a clever lad with a sharp scientific mind. He had a keen eye for detail as he proved to those whom he taught in Uganda and here in England.

Sadly, he was not always blest with

strong health. In fact, he returned to England in June 1965 like the priest in Graham Greene’s famous Story “The Burnt-Out Case.” I well remember serving his Mass in the Verona Sisters’ Oratory at Mirfield, West Yorkshire. I have never seen any priest in my fifty years of missionary priesthood trying to celebrate Mass with such great faith and strenuous effort as he celebrated in those difficult days of his priesthood. Tony never felt



Fr Ruben, Comboni Provincial, conducting the service.



Priests, family and relatives gather at the cemetery in prayer

sorry for himself or complained. He was a true Ilkley Moo bar tat Lad.

It was my privilege and joy to be asked to go up to Glasgow to look after Tony. We had some great laughs together. As on some nights we would like two old mates have a wee tippie of whiskey. Tony had a quick sense of humour. His mind was as sharp as a pin and sound as a pound. I admired his sense of deep simplicity. Apart from his taste for chocolates, he never showed a great desire to have many human comforts of life.

He was a Sheffield Wednesday football fan through and through. I don't know how many times he went to see the Glasgow Celtic at Parkhead, but he was always on the ball where the final results were

concerned. Wherever he lived and in whatever community of the Combonis he belonged to, he was warmly loved and fully appreciated. Indeed, he gave a sense of stability to the place.

He lived to the ripe old age of 96 when struck down by Covid 19, this well-beloved missionary priest was called by God to receive his just rewards.

We pray:

God's blessing upon you, Tony, for everything you have meant and will always mean.

Bless you for happiness shared; laughter, anniversaries, celebrations, for difficulties shared;

Love, friendship, missionary commitment.

For all we have gone through together, And all we will share in the life to come. God's blessings be upon you.

O God, our Father,

We beseech you for our brother priest, Fr Anthony Wolstenholme, who consecrated his life to the proclamation of the Gospel in Uganda, England, Wales and Scotland.

Now that he has fought the good fight, has finished his course and kept the faith, Grant him the reward of his apostolic labours in the heavenly Jerusalem, in communion with the Virgin Mary, St. Joseph, the Apostles, St. Daniel Comboni, St. Anthony and all the Saints.

Through Christ Our Lord. Amen.



Comboni priests and Fr. Anthony's family and relatives gather after a farewell meal

BLOODSHED, DEATHS, and BROKEN HEARTS

Despair is overwhelming fast. Thousands of women and children have been killed, entire families wiped out. Is it a war of terror or revenge? Would it be better to be dead than to endure the suffering of all that misery? Where are the days of hope that can outmatch so many days of despair? Without doubt, people are going through unspeakable horrors. One and a half million Palestinians seek refuge in Rafah, Gaza. The world is expressing its outrage of so many Palestinian deaths as it awaits justice from the International Court of Justice in the Hague, Holland. Israel is acting regardless of international laws, killing children and wiping out entire families. Internationally, some countries acknowledge that Israel is engaging in a genocidal regime. People can play with words about what constitutes and what does not constitute genocide -but reality speaks louder than words about thousands of lives lost in Gaza due to unrelenting bombardments of cities and hospitals.

People are starving to death which means increasing numbers of people in Gaza are falling sick whilst epidemic diseases spread. To worsen matters, the Palestinian population has been starving. There is a desperate shortage of food since it is very difficult to get aid into Gaza as there is not enough aid coming in by air/shipping. Many aid trucks travelling on land have been denied entrance.

HEARTS GRIEVED BY PAIN.

Against such an unbelievable background of suffering, human hearts are bound to be profoundly broken with grief. When we grieve, we leave someone behind or something very precious to us. The grief of suffering makes us stop and think. But how to accept the pain of grief? With or without our permission the grief is there. If only we knew how to deal with it. Let's never think we can control grief, such a



Basilica of Sacred Heart Montmartre

iStockcredit:wjarek

kind of unnamed pain inside, makes us restless and dissatisfied. Grief can go on for a long time after the death and funerals of loved ones especially in wartime. We may feel no one cares for us. The truth is no one can grieve in a hurry and then get on in life. The words of the psalmist ring true:

*“How much longer must I endure
grief in my soul,
and sorrow in my heart by day
and by night?”*

Psalm 13,2.

Tears must hang in the heart of Jesus as He looks down upon Gaza and the West Bank and in so many countries where wars and civil unrest rage on. Our God promises to wipe away all tears. Tears must have hung in the heart of Jesus as He grieved over the people who knew what daily suffering was all about.

Everyone grieves in their own way. There is no set model for grief. Grieving

for loved ones can never be rushed or avoided. That endless pain, those eyes shimmered with tears and many sleepless nights... Some describe grief like a journey on a train. You get on the grief train and a process happens to you over which you have little control as the train passes through stations called shock, anger, fear, searching and despair. Sooner or later the train arrives at its destination called acceptance. You alight from the train and start a new life.

During these harsh times of COVID 19 and the rising price of food and fuel, many poor people have shown me the suffering face of the Sacred Heart. As a MCCJ I need to have an immense heart of deep feeling for those who suffer. To feel the devastation of someone's grief, ay, there's the rub. O love of God in the Heart of Jesus, stay close to us in our times of grief. Help us in the dark moments of living with grief. May our faith hold together when our hearts are broken. CCJ.

A seven-year-old questions God

Father, what's it like where you have always been?
are there streets and houses, and country scenes?

My Mum says there are many rooms there.
Does that mean I won't have to share?

Is it sometimes cold in Heaven?
Do you watch the snowflakes fall?

Is there such a thing as night?
Or is it bathed in heavenly light?

Will there be time in Heaven?
Or just one endless day?

But won't we need the night to sleep?
Or will we forever play?

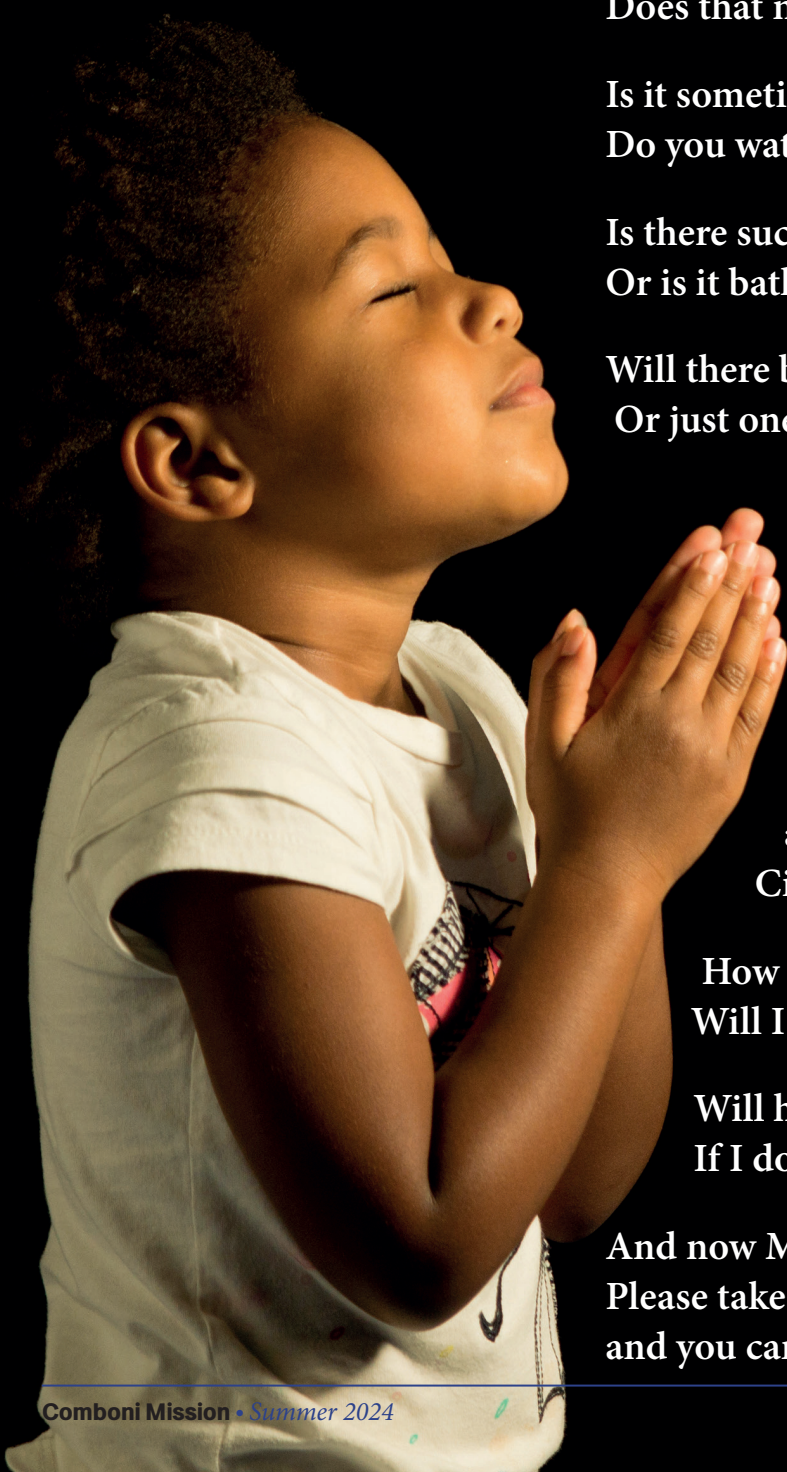
Next week we are going to Devon.
Will there be holidays in Heaven?

Will there be trains and planes;
and buses too?
Cinemas and trips to the Zoo?

How old will I be in Heaven?
Will I be as tall as my dad?

Will he still tell me off,
If I do something bad?

And now Mum says it's time for bed.
Please take note of what I've said;
and you can answer me in the morning.



Meeting of the European Directors of Comboni Media in London



Media meeting in Sunningdale

The morning of 27 February was dedicated to the reports of the Directors of each circumscription on any new developments in the various editorial offices represented: Verona (Italy), Madrid (Spain), London (London Province), German-speaking Province (DSP) and the General Administration (Rome).

Some of the participants expressed an urgent need to clearly regulate the search for and use of photos used by our magazines and websites, avoiding copyright

violations, resulting in fines or penalties. It has been pointed out that sensitivity to the issue has doubled in recent years and, therefore, our consideration of this issue must be redoubled. In this regard, there was a reference to an article, entitled “Legal Considerations on the Use and Publication of Images,” published in the MCCJ Bulletin n° 290, January 2022, pp. 57-60, which could help confreres working in the field of communication.

It has also been said that for years we have been talking about the need to cre-

ate a digital archive of photos – with the exclusive copyright of the Comboni Missionaries – accessible to all our publications. It was therefore reiterated that a common photo library for all Comboni Media – possibly also involving the General Administration – should be one of the initiatives to be included in the European Media Centre Project.

The difficulty of finding people was also discussed– confreres and lay people – who can write regularly from the Provinces and countries where we are present.

With regard to the decline in the circulation of our magazines, it has been acknowledged that a decrease in subscriptions on printed paper is part of the broader process of alienation with reading, which transcends the boundaries of the field of publishing. That said, it was agreed that there is still time to attempt to improve the situation.

The Assembly of Missionary Promotion for the whole Institute to be held from 22 to 26 April 2024 in Rome was also discussed. In preparation for this meeting, the General Secretariat for Mission sent a questionnaire to the participants of the circumscriptions, the answers received will serve to outline a contemporary overview of the Comboni Mission from the perspective of missionary promotion which also includes the Media. The participants were also reminded of a study entitled "The state (of health) of Comboni Publications", which appeared in MCCJ Bulletin n° 293, October 2022, pp. 20-36.

Fr. Carmine Curci presented a historical background on the path of the European

Media Centre Project, the idea of which was presented for the first time at the European Assembly of Missionary Promotion in 2012, in Pesaro (Italy).

Wednesday 28 February was dedicated to addressing the main point of the meeting, namely the drafting of the project document for the European Media Centre. The various aims of the Centre were discussed, including the provision of practical training in journalism (especially for confreres), networking, the exchange of material between our media centres and the sustainability of our various initiatives.

Several proposals emerged, the synthesis of which produced the document that will be sent to the Provincial Superiors of Europe. The document, voted on and signed by the Directors present, proposes the following name for the centre: Comboni European Media Centre (CEMEC), based in Dawson Place (London), and asks for both a date for the official opening of CEMEC and the formal appointment of its Director. The day ended

with a short round of feedback. All the participants hailed the meeting and applauded the fact that the desire to arrive at a concrete proposal prevailed over divisions. The meeting ended on the morning of 29 February with Lauds and the celebration of Mass.

Participating in the meeting were: Br. Tomasz Basiński, media representative of the circumscription superiors of Europe; Fr. Padilla Rocha Rubén, Provincial of the London Province (27-28 February); Fr. Enrique Bayo, Director of Mundo Negro (Spain); Fr. Giuseppe Cavallini, Director of Nigrizia (Italy); Brando Ricci, Editor of Nigrizia (Italy); Fr. Günther Hofmann, representing the German-speaking Province (DSP); Fr. Carmine Curci, representing the London Province (Southworld and LP websites); Fr. John Downey, representing the London Province (Comboni Mission); and Fr. Arlindo Pinto, representing the General Administration (Communications Office). Absent (excused): representatives of Portugal (Além-Mar editorial) and Poland (Misjonarze Kombonianie).



Participants pause for a photo shoot: Br. Tomasz Basiński, Fr. Günther Hofmann, Fr. John Downey, Fr. Giuseppe Cavallini, Fr. Enrique Bayo, Fr. Arlindo Pinto, Fr. Carmine Curci; and Fr. Padilla Rocha Rubén.



Our Prison Ministry

iStockcredit: EvgeniyShkolenko

In the past I have visited 3 prisons in a variety of ministries.

In Wormwood scrubs I met with individual prisoners to share the gospel. At Feltham young offenders I mentored a young lad who had become a catholic while in prison; and in Reading prison I ran a bible study with a dozen prisoners.

A couple of years ago we formed an evangelising group to see how we could spread the Good News of Jesus. We decided to seek to be involved with prison ministry; so, I found myself after some years back in prison ministry. Alice de Lima and myself applied to join the chaplaincy team in Coldingley Prison, Woking, Surrey We are approaching 2 years as volunteers with the catholic chaplaincy.

We began by helping out at the Saturday Mass; but have since become involved with the prayer group that meets on a Thursday afternoon. Both days have become a great blessing.

We are all in need of God's forgiveness; but in prison, for me it is so essential to share with these men the love of Jesus and

his compassion and mercy. We have time to share at coffee after Mass; but at the prayer group we get the chance to share teaching from the Gospel and to pray for healing with those who come.

Some lads who have been in prison for a long time can lose hope and often despair. It is a privilege for both Alice and myself to encourage them in their faith and to be a beacon of hope in a desperate place. It has been wonderful not only to do this; but to see the faith of men who have met with Jesus whilst in prison and proclaim him not only to us but to other inmates.

We have come to know many of these men over time; building up trustful friendships as we share their journey with them. Sometimes the men leave very suddenly as they may be moved to another prison or set free. So, we don't always have time to wish them well. It is of course good that they move on, but we miss them when they are gone. We are both now key holders and I am awaiting radio training that will open doors to visit the men on an individual basis on the wings. We are part of a great

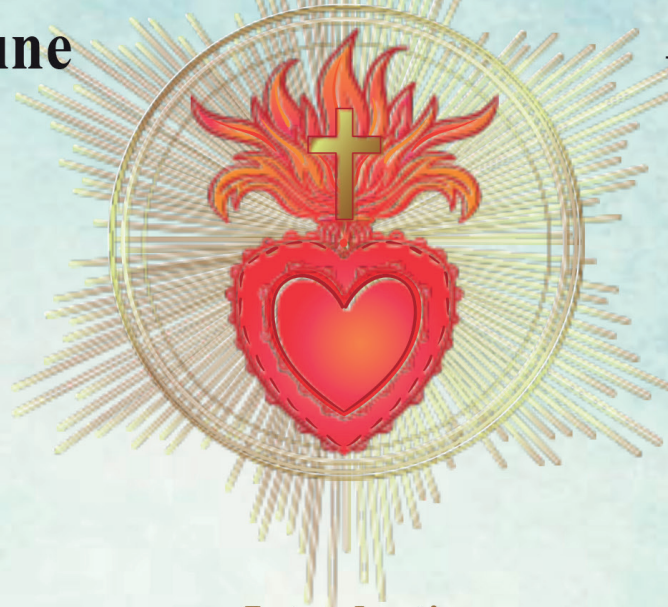
team here at Coldingley; with other volunteers David and Isobel, and the full-time chaplain, Ingrid Mayer. We were welcomed right from the start and settled in straight away. Father David and Father John from our Sacred Heart community have also joined at times coming to take the Mass for us. Please pray for this ministry to grow; and that more men may feel led to join the Saturday Mass and the prayer group. Sometimes there are issues on the wings that stop them coming, or other things going on that hinder attendance.

I will close with something beautiful that happened for me.

I am a painter and had hoped one day to complete the Stations of the Cross. I finally did this some months ago. It happened to coincide with the decoration of the Chapel. Gerlinde who was part time chaplain at the time indicated that they were looking for new stations. I was happy to oblige and my charcoal drawings are now a permanent display on the walls of the Chapel! And I am now waiting for another set to go to Gerlinde's new prison!

Sacred^{the} Heart

30 May-7 June
2024



Novena

Fr Gerard Condon
www.messenger.ie

Introduction

The saints were united by their love for God and their desire to make God's love known. Each expressed their devotion in different ways, drawing on their personal histories, their spiritual gifts and the needs of their times. While ours is a very different era, it is also true that 'there is nothing new under the sun' (Ecclesiastes 1:9). We can learn much from the saints' courage, their good example and, over the days of this novena, we can join our prayers to theirs, thinking over what they have said. Each day of the novena features a different saint or blessed or venerable.

Novena Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, your heart was moved with love for those who came for help in their need. You healed the sick, you fed the hungry, you forgave sinners, you cried over Jerusalem. Above all, you showed to those who were prepared to listen the way to true life, for you are the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Lord, your heart is still moved today by your people and their many needs. Open my heart to hear your word, to accept your love and to respond to your call. In particular, I beg you to grant me the favour I ask during this Novena (make your request silently), provided that it will contribute to my own eternal good and to the building up of your kingdom of love, peace and justice here on earth.

Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, I place all my trust in you.

Sacred^{the} Heart Novena

30 May–7 June
2024



Day One

‘I will both lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O Lord, make me lie down in safety.’ (Psalm 4:8)

In his Vatican apartment, Pope Francis keeps a statue of Saint Joseph, stretched out and sound asleep. It’s an unusual representation of the saint who is known as the guardian of the Church. The Holy Father likes the image, because it reminds him not to believe that he must solve every problem alone. Like Saint Joseph, we can hand our situation over to the Lord, who gives us inspiration while we sleep, sometimes in ways we do not comprehend. Saint Joseph’s dreams explained the divine origin of Mary’s motherhood and gave him practical guidance (Matthew 1:18–2:23). Many other saints, including Patrick of Ireland, appreciated the religious significance of their dreams.

Lord, each night, help me to commend my spirit into your hands. Amen.

Day Two

‘So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ: be reconciled to God.’ (2 Corinthians 5:20)

The writings of Saint Columban (543–615) include some of the earliest references to the European ideal. ‘*Totius Europae*’, all of

Europe, he wrote, could be united around Christian values. Robert Schuman, one of the architects of the European Union, called him, ‘the patron of all those who seek to build a united Europe’. In AD 590, he set out from Bangor, County Down, on a small open boat, across unchartered waters and into inhospitable lands. He founded a network of monasteries across France, Belgium, Germany and Switzerland. His final resting place, at Bobbio, became a centre of prayer and learning as Europe entered its Dark Ages.

Lord, no matter what my age or ability, make me an instrument of your peace. Amen.

Day Three

‘But the aim of such instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith.’ (1 Timothy 1:5)

The film *A Man for all Seasons* was a box office success on its release in 1966. It recounts the final years of the martyr, Saint Thomas More (1478–1535). More trained as a lawyer and was elected to parliament. In 1529, King Henry VIII made him Lord Chancellor of England, being the first layman to hold the office. But More ran afoul of the king for not supporting the annulment of his marriage. He did not publicly contest Henry’s bid for an independent Church of England, preferring to resign from office and lead a retired life. As such, his imprisonment in the Tower of London was not for what he said or did, but simply for what he thought. In his prison cell, More developed the notion of freedom of conscience. On 6 July 1535, he mounted the gallows satisfied that he was ‘the king’s good servant, but God’s first’.

Lord, help me to remain true to my faith, to bear witness to it patiently and with charity. Amen.

Day Four

‘Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil.’ (1 Thessalonians 5:19–21)

They say that every crisis presents an opportunity. This was certainly the case for Saint Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556), a soldier from Basque Spain, who was wounded in battle on 20 May 1521. His long convalescence proved to be a decisive turning point in his life. Ignatius observed that, while worldly successes would bring fleeting happiness, his deepest fulfilment could only be found in God. Hence the motto of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) that he founded: *Ad majorem Dei gloriam*. Everything about his life would be ‘to the greater glory of God’. Ignatius believed that God has a specific calling for each person. His *Spiritual Exercises* (1548) invite us to dispose ourselves to God’s will. We can do that when we face a major decision, and even daily, as we review each day’s events. *Lord, may all that I do give you glory. Amen.*

Day Five

‘Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.’ (John 14:1)

Today, Ireland is at peace with itself and its neighbours. But much of its history has been marred by conflict. Each time I drive through Youghal, County Cork, I take note of the plaque which marks the site where Blessed Dominic Collins (1566–1602) was martyred on 31 October 1602. Collins came from one of the town’s leading families. After attending the local Jesuit school, he sailed for France, partly to escape the oppression of Catholics and partly to pursue his chosen career with

the military. He rose to the rank of officer with the Duke of Mercoeur, but became disillusioned with army life and joined the Jesuits at Santiago as a brother. In 1601, he accompanied the Spanish Armada to Ireland as non-combatant chaplain. Following the defeat of the Irish and Spanish armies at Kinsale, Collins was captured and tortured at Dunboy Castle. Refusing to renounce the Catholic faith, he was sent back to his native town to be hanged. Dominic Collins was among seventeen Irish martyrs beatified in 1992. *Lord, preserve the reconciliation that has been established in our country. Amen.*

Day Six

‘They will look on the one whom they have pierced.’ (John 19:37)

Devotion to the Sacred Heart uses an image of Christ’s heart to remind us of his love. By looking at the crucified Christ, we come to know that God has suffered with us, in solidarity with the human condition. His suffering was also for our sake. Christ’s sacred heart, full of God’s compassion, has brought salvation to the world. Some of the Church’s most recognised saints, including Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux and Bonaventure all developed the theology of the Sacred Heart. But it was a French nun, Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647–1690) who popularised the devotion. Between 1673 and 1675, as she prayed before the Blessed Sacrament, at the convent of Paray-le-Monial, Saint Margaret received revelations of Christ radiant with love. Jesus promised consolation to all who honoured him, through prayer and the display of his image in their homes. Devotion to the Sacred Heart corrected the harsh Jansenist spirituality of that time. *Sacred Heart of Jesus, give me your blessing, so that all I do today may be directed to your honour. Amen.*

Sacred ^{the} Heart Novena

30 May–7 June
2024



Day Seven

**‘Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.’
(Matthew 5:7–8)**

On 24 June, 1950, some half-a-million people attended the canonisation of Saint Maria Goretti (1890–1902) at the Vatican. Among them was Maria’s mother and Alessandro Serenelli, the man who had brought about her martyrdom. Maria was raised in an impoverished community at Nettuno, south of Rome. Among her neighbours was Serenelli, an abusive and violent youth. On the occasion of her martyrdom, she resisted his advances, and he stabbed her multiple times, fatally injuring the child. In hospital, as she died, Maria forgave her attacker. Serenelli received a long prison sentence and sank into a deep despair because of his crime. Then, six years later, he had an extraordinary revelation of Maria appearing in his cell surrounded by lilies. The vision brought about his repentance and conversion. On his release, in 1927, Serenelli begged the Goretti family for forgiveness. He subsequently took up work as a gardener at a monastery.

Lord, receiving your divine mercy, make me merciful. Amen.

Day Eight

**‘Don’t be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.’
(Philippians 4:6–7)**

You are probably familiar with the phrase, ‘The family that prays together, stays together.’ It was made popular by Venerable Patrick Peyton (1909–1992). Peyton came from a subsistence farming background in County Mayo. Each night, his parents would call the family together for the rosary. In 1928, Patrick emigrated to the United States and found work as a janitor at Scranton Cathedral. There, his vocation to the priesthood was nurtured and he joined the Holy Cross Congregation. His rosary rallies drew millions. But Father Peyton never forgot his humble origins. His practical advice gave many people the strength to bear their burdens. He saw the family as the key to society, and prayer as the key to family life.

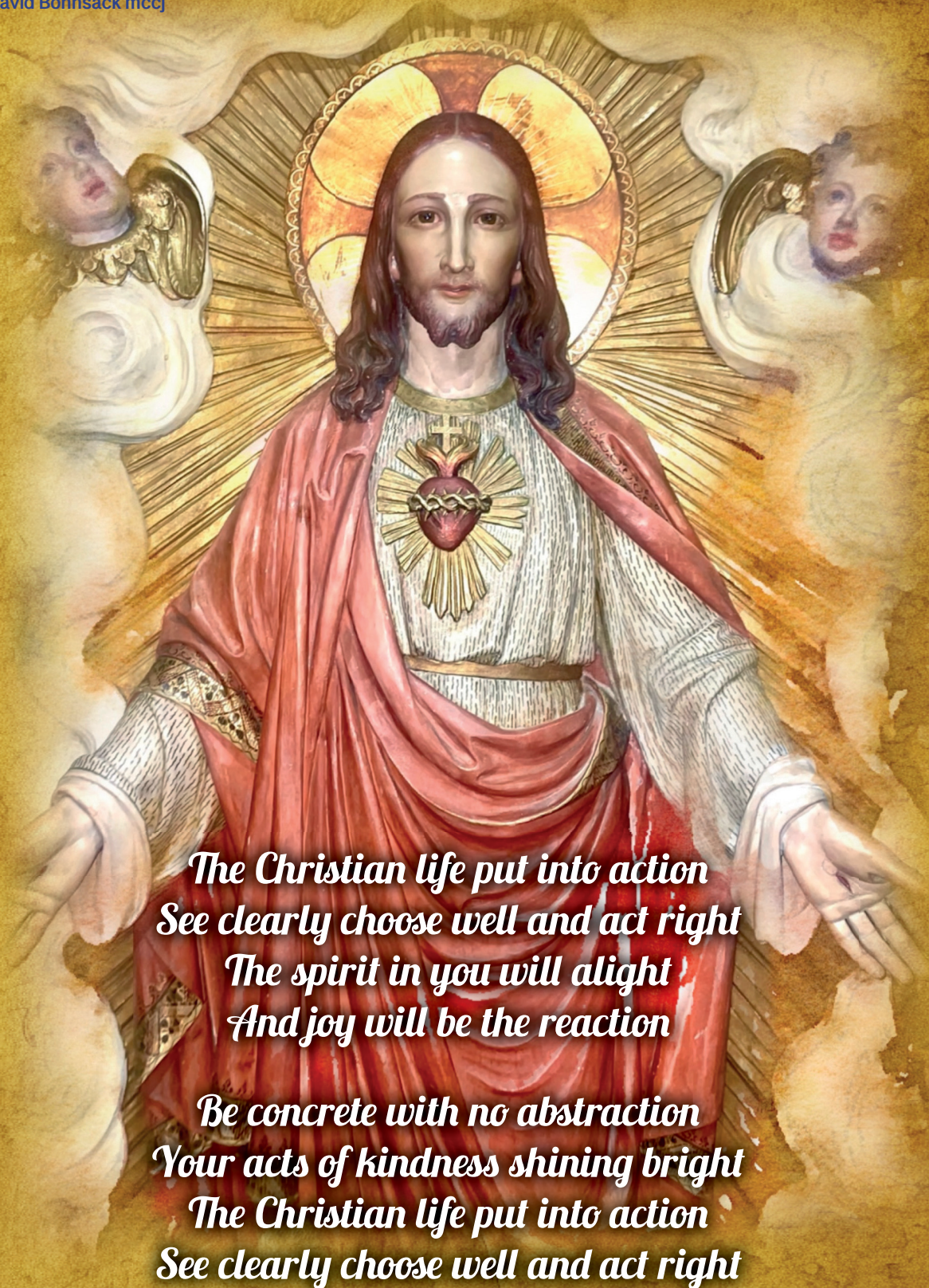
Lord, may I witness to my faith through prayer and love for my family. Amen.

Day Nine

**‘After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill scripture), “I am thirsty.”’
(John 19:28)**

Saint Mother Teresa was raised in a devout Catholic family in Macedonia. In 1928, she joined the Irish Loreto Sisters and began to teach at their school in Calcutta (now Kolkata). She began to assist the sick and the dying by offering accommodation, basic medical care and, above all, tender love. Soon, other young Indian women joined her effort. Later, Mother Teresa noticed new types of poverty in the developed world. ‘Hunger is not only for a piece of bread’, she remarked, ‘Hunger is for love.’ Lonely people suffer a terrible hunger. Each of the Missionaries of Charity convents contains a chapel with a large crucifix and the words ‘I thirst’ inscribed in the local language. The phrase is both a reminder of the Lord’s desire for our devotion and of his cry for help in all who suffer.

Lord Jesus, help me to recognise you today in those who need my love. Amen.



*The Christian life put into action
See clearly choose well and act right
The spirit in you will alight
And joy will be the reaction*

*Be concrete with no abstraction
Your acts of kindness shining bright
The Christian life put into action
See clearly choose well and act right*

*It can start a chain reaction
For truthfulness can love ignite
And help another see the light
There is no greater satisfaction
The Christian life put into action*

ISRAEL/PALESTINE

Sister Expedita Perez, from Bethany: “The Doors of the Desert”



iStock credit: Elena Chertovskikh

Our community of Al Azarieh is very close to Jerusalem, in the place that in Jesus’ time was called Bethany. From here, we usually go on Saturdays to visit some Bedouin communities in the West Bank, but we have stopped doing so due to the insecurity surrounding us since October 7th.

Early one Saturday, we decided it was time to resume our visits and off we went. When they saw us arrive, the women and children were overjoyed. Some of them told us that the little ones waited for us every Saturday and that, when they saw evening fall, they said sadly: “The Sisters aren’t coming today either.”

Bedouin children

On these visits, we work with the women by doing typical Palestinian embroidery on scarves and offering them English lessons. We also play with the children, although, to be honest, I think what they like most are the gifts they receive if they manage to win

“For us Comboni Missionary Sisters it is very important to be with them and walk with them, especially in this painful and difficult moment. We told them we would be back.

Furthermore, we accompany our response with words of encouragement, because we have lit up in our hearts, each of us from our own faith, be it Muslim, Jewish or Christian, the hope of being able to live as brothers and sisters, in peace and justice”, Sister Expedita Perez tells us. [Comboni Missionaries]



iStock credit: PorqueNoStudios

in one of the activities we do with them. In any case, on that day, we had a lot of fun with both the ladies and the children. The women told us that they had not left their village since the outbreak of the conflict for fear of the settlers.

In fact, to get to one of the four villages we visited that first day, we had to take a detour through the desert because the settlers had closed two of the closest gates. Some of the women also confessed to us that they barely slept during the first few weeks for fear of being attacked. The children had not been to school for more than a month. On the first day classrooms reopened, it took about three hours to get in and another three hours to get out of Jericho.

A desert scene with Jericho in the background

It is there that the United Nations school for the Bedouins living in the refugee

camp and for those living in the nearby desert is based. That day, of course, they didn't make it to class on time. Thank God, the school principal reached an agreement with the Israeli soldiers who control the entrance to Jericho and now let the school bus pass through immediately.

A lady told me that one of the kindergarten children asks her mother the same question every day: "Is there war today or is there kindergarten?" If her mother tells her that she is going to kindergarten, she immediately wakes up very happy, but if the answer is no, she remains in bed sad and silent because she feels she is in danger. That is how children are. In the four villages we visited that Saturday, the women told us of the difficult time they are now going through. They live in fear and, on top of that, their husbands are at home without work because they cannot enter Israel or the settlements where they worked in the Judean desert.

The food, already very simple, has become even more sober. When we said goodbye, almost all the women asked us if we would be back next week. They told us that our presence is very important for them because we offer them the opportunity to experience a different, relaxed and joyful day, beyond the fact that they can learn English and the technique of embroidery.

Also, for us Comboni Missionary Sisters it is very important to be with them and walk with them, especially in this painful and difficult moment. We told them we would be back. Furthermore, we accompany our response with words of encouragement, because we have lit up in our hearts, each of us from our own faith, be it Muslim, Jewish or Christian, the hope of being able to live as brothers and sisters, in peace and justice.

Supporting the Nekemte school Project

Fr. Melaku, our Comboni missionary based at Leeds, continues to ask your aid for the school project in Nekemte.

At the same time, he thanks you for your generous fundraising and personal contributions. Read on and see how you can help.



Fr Melaku

Ethiopia is still one of the most educationally disadvantaged countries in the world. In particular, people who live in rural areas do not have access to education. Ethiopia has the second largest population in Africa, after Nigeria. The population is growing rapidly and, at this moment, is over 129,000,000. Therefore, unless children receive a good education now, Ethiopia will inevitably face hunger, poverty and misery for generations to come.

In the past 20 years, the Ethiopian government has opened several Universities and Colleges in different parts of the

country. With a population of 129 million people, these are just a drop in the ocean. According to

UNESCO, Ethiopia has an adult literacy rate of 51.77%, an indication that the country has a long way to go to educate future generations. The standard of education is extremely low compared with other countries. In 2023, 896,520 students took the University entrance examination in two rounds, conducted for the first time by the public Universities themselves in a bid to prevent cheating. The Ethiopian minister of education Professor Birhanu Nega disclosed that a total of 29,909 high

school students managed to score 50% and above in the 2023 University entrance examinations, only 3.2% of the high school population.

The Nekemte region is the most neglected area in Ethiopia from the educational point of view. I can't deny that there are some schools in the area, but what kind of education can be delivered when you have 90, 100 or more children in a classroom? I'm very sceptical that even a very basic teaching and learning process can be achieved in this situation. In 2023, the number of school students who passed the University Entrance Examination in the Nekemte area was much lower than in previous years. We all understand that education is essential for development, and it not right that disadvantaged children are left behind, without even a basic education.

The Nekemte Eco-School project proposal addresses the problem of a lack of school buildings for primary and junior secondary school education. The infrastructure and the curriculum at Nekemte School will enable the project to meet national standards. It will provide an excellent school, which should help to produce moral, academic, human and spiritually responsible future leaders. All children will be treated equally, irrespective of their religious or ethnic background.

The first phase of the School project was completed at the end of 2023. It comprises five classrooms with toilet facilities, an administration block of five rooms, site work, plumbing work and electrical work. Five thousand square metres of land has



Children cry out for better facilities

been fenced in with brick-built walls. In three months' time, the furniture for the existing 5 classrooms, made locally, will be ready. Office equipment and furniture for the administration block will also be ready. The school will open in September 2024.

The second phase of construction started in January 2024. This building will comprise a ground floor and two upper floors. There will be 16 class-rooms, toilet facilities, a library, IT rooms, two labora-

tories and a staff room.

We are so grateful to all our donors, individuals, fundraisers in different places, religious institutes, two schools and three parishes for their amazing contributions. As a result of their generosity, we have secured half of the estimated costs for this second phase of construction (excluding the cost of furniture). The second phase of construction is scheduled for completion in December 2025. When it is completed, the primary school will

accommodate 720 children.

This project offers job opportunities for more than 25 teachers and other staff members. Our overall aim is to provide a quality education for our children which will enable them to progress in their future lives. Education is key to the positive development of countries; for this, many developing countries need to rely initially on external financial support.

I appeal to your kind donation for Nekemte School. Please make your cheque payable to "Comboni Missionaries" or "Verona Fathers". Write "Nekemte School" on the back of the cheque. If you are a tax-payer in the UK or the Republic of Ireland, please ask for a Gift Aid form from the Sunningdale, Dublin, Glasgow or Leeds missionary offices, to which you can also send your donation. The addresses are on page two of the quarterly magazine.

In advance I'm grateful to all of you, for understanding the irreplaceable value of educating our disadvantaged brothers and sisters!

My contact email:
melakutafessea@yahoo.com

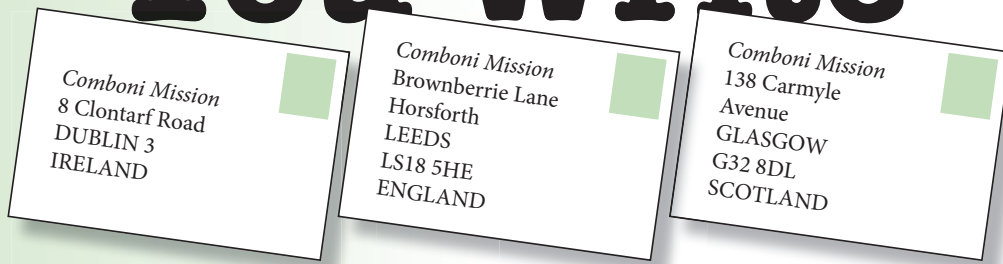
Mobile: - 0044 07572626887

Thanks a lot
Fr. Melaku Tafesse Amente (MCCJ)



Ongoing building work

You Write



Thank you once again for your most welcome letters. It reminds us that some people do read our missionary magazine! Reading today is becoming less and less a daily pleasure.

To encourage you all our readers: to let us know your thoughts and opinions, I will post here my address so that your comments come directly to our office!

**Editor, Verona Fathers - Email: jdcomboni@gmail.com
London Road, Sunningdale SL5 0JY#, Berks, England**

Dear Father John,
I hope your journey went well!

Can I express my sincere thanks for a wonderful day. It was very much appreciated by all Uncle Tony's family and friends and was wonderful to hear so many stories about him.

It was an absolute pleasure to share the day with some truly amazing people.

I would like a copy of the magazine 'Comboni Mission' you mentioned. Could you forward one to me?

Many thanks.

Charlotte Walsh,

(grandniece of Fr Anthony Wolstenholme on the occasion of the interment of his ashes)



Casket with ashes of Fr. Anthony and his brother Peter

Dear Fr John,

As always, I look forward to the Comboni magazine and many thanks to you all.

Thank you for sending me the book 'Supreme Witness'.

I have been reading the book detailing the wonderful life of Blessed Joseph Ambrosoli and was so impressed by his dedicated life and witness. May he intercede for us.

God bless you

Yours in the love of Christ

Anne Marie Allen

Cheltenham

Dear Friends,

Thank you so much for your magazine and lovely 2024 calendar.

I enclose a donation for masses and once again many thanks for all you do around our troubled world.

Marie Mottau,

London

Dear Fr. John

How lovely it was to open the last Comboni magazine and to see the beaming face of Fr. Andrew with friends and working from the Don Bosco centre of Ashalayam! He has been a great friend to me and my children who attended the Salesian school in Chertsey and it is so sad to lose him. I now enjoy reading about his work at don Bosco, Ashalayam and reading about the children. If only I was a sixth former and had the opportunity to visit his school!

On a different note, I just want to say how sad I feel when reading 'Missionaries killed in 2023', So many lives taken, young and old, people doing such good work.

Yours sincerely,

Sophie Fitzpatrick,

Walton-on-Thames

Mission Visit

‘It’s like living in a cage’

Fr Anthony Chantry, the National Director of Missio, was recently invited to visit refugee camps in Thailand. The purpose of his visit was to express solidarity, and offer support, to our sisters and brothers who have faced ongoing persecution and hardship due to the political turmoil in Myanmar. Here is his personal reflection on his experience:

It has been some time since I travelled down an unwelcoming road. As we twisted our way through a dense forest, the track was potholed throughout and waterlogged in several places. ‘I wonder whether this road will be tarmacked one day,’ I pondered in the smooth silence of my imagination. However, it proved to be a very apt preparation for what, in contrast, I was to experience in the refugee camp at Mae Hong Son in northern Thailand.

I was with Fr Dominic, effectively the Parish



Fr Chantry with parish priest Fr Dominic

Priest of the camp, who must travel the same route every day as he is not allowed to live in the camp itself. He is a priest from Myanmar (Burma), unable to return to his home because of the ongoing civil war instigated by its military dictatorship. It is a largely unreported conflict, which usually gives licence to those who choose to create humanitarian crises.

Ethnic groups in the northwest and south-east of Myanmar are seeking their right to self-determination, which has been met with an unrelenting suppression by the local Armed Forces. For three years there has been full blown civil war, which shows no sign of ending.

According to reports, more than 2 million people are now internally displaced and re-

quire urgent assistance. An estimated 77,000 civilian properties, including houses, religious structures, education, and health facilities, have reportedly been destroyed.

Driven from their homes, many fearing for their lives have fled into neighbouring Thailand. Thousands of families have sought safety at the Mae Hong Son refugee camp.

The unwelcoming road ended at the police checkpoint where Fr Dominic negotiated my entry into the camp with the permits already granted and issued for our visit. In contrast to the journey, the welcome we received from the people as they gathered for Sunday Mass is something to treasure. ‘Thank you for visiting us because we often feel forgotten and abandoned by the outside world. Your visit gives us hope,’ was the widespread reaction to our visit.

Mae Hong Son is the home to thousands of refugees, among them a large Catholic community. The church, which they built themselves, is a fragile wooden structure holding two to three hundred people for Mass.

On that Sunday the church was packed, with many outside, and for over two hours the people sang their hearts out in praise and adoration of the One who stands with them in their suffering.

Mary Nanja shared her situation with me: her husband was somehow able to leave for

work overseas, leaving her in the camp with her three children. ‘There is nothing left for me in Burma. Our home was destroyed, and we were forced to leave the country. Life is very tough here in the camp, but at least we are safe. I hope my children will have a better future. It is like living in a cage, but I know God is with us and will help us one day to be free.’

Fr Dominic works hard to bring people together and give them the hope that Jesus gives in his mission. Jesus was sent by the Father, armed with the power of the Spirit, to ‘set captives free’ and to be Good News to those who are powerless.

Not all is hopeless. Both humanitarian and Catholic organisations are striving to alleviate the suffering of the refugees.

I am happy to report that Missio – that’s you and I – stand in solidarity with them through prayer and action. We are helping them to build a better structure for their place of community and worship. A church that will provide a welcome, and give hope to our brothers and sisters who face an uncertain future.

As I left Mae Hong Son I realised, as I have many times before, that I leave richer than I entered. Their faith has strengthened mine; their hope has enriched mine; their love has challenged mine. And somehow, that road doesn’t seem so unwelcoming.



The Church is overcrowded

Month of the Sacred Heart

30 MASSES

will be offered at our three mission centres in honour of the Sacred Heart, for these and your intentions

For your spiritual and material needs and for health in mind and body

For peace and justice in the world, especially where there is war and conflict

For sick and terminally ill among your relations and friends



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For the needs of your family, especially for serenity, unity and the practice of the faith

For all Comboni Missionaries of the Heart of Jesus, particularly those who are ill or exposed to danger

For any specific intention(s) you may wish to make

**O, how much upon the Cross
Didst thy bowed head, O Christ,
Thy hands flung wide, Thy open heart Breathe forth love.
Son of God who didst come to redeem the lost,
Condemn not the redeemed
Crying out Thee from the valley of tears.
Good Jesu, hear thou our groaning,
And take not the measure of our crimes.
We implore thy wounded Heart,
O tender God**

Write your intentions for the sacred heart masses on the leaflet provided and return to your nearest mission office.



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